

February 3, 2003

Local Boundary Commission  
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Re: Written comments on the standards of Borough Incorporation for the proposed Prince of Wales Model Borough

I am against the establishment of any new governmental agency on Prince of Wales Island at this time. Particularly one that would have the powers and costs of an island wide Borough. I have lived in Thorne Bay for over 20 years and have witnessed many changes. A boom of population and economy in the 80s and 90s to the severe decline of both in 2000. Even since the 2000 census, the population has fallen dramatically in our community as well as many others. Applying the standards of Borough Incorporation set up by the state. It is my opinion that Prince of Wales Island does not meet the criteria at this time.

Economic Capacity of the Region

There is not currently an economic base on Prince of Wales Island to support a borough government let alone support the objectives of having a borough established. Our current population is not large enough or stable enough. We can not even finance our own city government today at the level it was two years ago.

The big logging and road building crews supported by a single organization, Ketchikan Pulp, are gone. The price of commercially caught fish is down and the number of local permit holders has dropped dramatically in all communities. Many of the support businesses have folded and moved away or cut back on services offered. The amount of private land/property on Prince of Wales Island is relatively small. Land owners such as the U.S. Forest Service, State of Alaska, Mental Health Trust, University of Alaska, and Native Corporations all own large tracts of land on our Island. All these land owners are tax exempt by the state. The burden of paying for the borough government and it's projects would be on the remaining economically depressed residents.

Large and Stable Population

As I stated above the large logging and road building crews employing residents are gone from this island as they are from all of Southeast Alaska. Many of the past populations numbers referred to in your draft are related to that transit logging industry that is now gone. The current population is not stable due to a lack of jobs and will not be stable until a new industry becomes established. Communities on the Island are open to new industry to help our Island progress and population increase. No industry to meet our economic needs has been established at this time.

Sufficiently Interrelated and Integrated to Support a Borough Government

Prince of Wales is an Island. Being an Island makes the communities here geographically located in the same place but not interrelated or integrated. Some communities on the island are isolated, without road access by choice. Other communities are Native with their own land base, health care system, their own jobs not open to non natives, and different hunting and fishing regulations. Communities were connected in the past by a common employer and within the last three years the interaction has been reduced to minor contact while shopping for goods and services. My experience from past days of active logging crews is that workers came from all over the island to work together and exchange ideas and keep in contact with other communities. We used to know who lived in the other communities and what their concerns were. Now each community is developing on it's own to provide a place for it's local residents to survive.

A Borough Government would Serve the Broad Public

Sometimes it is hard to see how one more level of government would serve the public. The continuing controversy that goes on between the Ketchikan Borough and the City of Ketchikan governments is not needed nor requested on Prince of Wales Island. However, it is conceivable that in times of good economic health, with a stable population, and good interaction between island communities, that one local entity with borough powers could be in the best interest of Prince of Wales Island. To establish that government ahead of that time would be premature and would create an even deeper recession on the island.

In summary I don't see how Prince of Wales Island currently meets the standards of Borough incorporation. As a long time resident, I am against the establishment of any borough government at this time on Prince of Wales Island.

Sincerely,

*Jean McFarland*  
*Resident Prince of Wales Island*